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NEWS RELEASE

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Nethercutt seeks \$3.5 million for Rathdrum aquifer study

'Study is a win-win for environment and economy,' congressman says

WASHINGTON – Today Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.) introduced legislation to authorize a study on the Rathdrum Prairie-Spokane Valley Aquifer, citing the need to balance good environmental stewardship with the need to bring more jobs to the Spokane area.

“Water is one of the most precious resources in the Northwest,” Nethercutt said. “And this study is essential to the best possible management of the only source for Spokane’s drinking water. Spokane County needs a strong voice in protecting its drinking water.”

The bill authorizes \$3.5 million for the Department of Interior to study the Rathdrum Prairie-Spokane Valley aquifer and develop a comprehensive computer model that will provide a scientifically defensible understanding of regional aquifer in both states. The bill stipulates that the study must be completed within three years of the bill’s enactment.

Spokane County and Kootenai manage the aquifer very differently, in part because the limited and sometimes conflicting data on the aquifer can be interpreted in many ways. A study would provide data for the entities to reach a common understanding, seen by many as key to protecting the drinking water of thousands in the Inland Northwest, as well as making sure that jobs aren’t kept out of the area due to a 10-year wait for water rights.

“This study will help us create a win-win situation for the environment and the economy here,” Nethercutt said.

Idaho First District Rep. Butch Otter, an original cosponsor of the bill, said, "It is critical to the environmental and economic well-being of Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington that we have a thorough understanding of the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie aquifer. The aquifer is the sole source of drinking water for close to a half million Inland Northwest residents, as well as an integral resource for continued economic development in the region.”

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Otter continued, "We must have a reliable estimate of how much water flows through that underground river, how much we are currently using, and the rate of recharge from various sources. A comprehensive study of the aquifer will provide us with the reliable information we need to ensure this valuable resource is used wisely and available for future generations."

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